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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (01/06): New settlement construction in East Jerusalem calls into question Israel's commitment to peace

Main Stories:

-----The lead stories in three dailies focus on the Jerusalem municipality endorsing a new settlement neighborhood of 24 housing units on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. Al-Quds runs a headline saying the Jerusalem mayor is undermining the US position regarding settlement activities. Al-Quds quotes Palestinian Authority (PA) Presidency Spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina condemning the decision, saying that the continued construction in East Jerusalem is a challenge to Arab and international efforts to achieve peace.

PA official daily Al-Hayat Al-Jadida front pages news on PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat noting that Israel continues to talk about peace while constructing more settlements. He reiterated that PA President Mahmoud Abbas will not agree to the resumption of negotiations without a full settlement freeze.

Local press reports on PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad affirming the dedication of the PA to clear the West Bank markets of settlement products and helped toss goods made in Israeli settlements into a fire.

The dailies report on President Abbas confirming that a US peace plan is being prepared, supported by US guarantees for Israelis and Palestinians to ensure its success. Abbas reiterated that he told the US he won't agree to resume talks with the Israelis without a full settlement freeze.

Al-Quds runs front page coverage citing Israeli media sources that senior Israeli decision makers oppose discussing the borders issue first in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations based on the anticipated US peace plan.

Independent daily Al-Ayyam reports on clashes between members of the humanitarian aid convoy Viva Palestine and the Egyptian police yesterday at the Al-Arish port after the convoy was not allowed to enter Gaza through Rafah.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida front pages news on the Former Chief of Mossad Efraim Halevy admitting in an interview with the Israeli Army Radio that Israel has opened communication lines with Hamas in Gaza. He also called for weakening the authority of President Abbas, saying he "is unnecessary and it is time to overthrow him." He also called for weakening the PA and its security forces, noting that the US and Western support for the PA must stop. He said, "Hamas can be an alternate to the PA." This is a contradiction to statements of support for President Abbas and the PA security forces from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli officials.

Al-Quds published results of an opinion public poll conducted by Near East Consulting to assess which news outlets Palestinians say are their most trusted sources of information. The sample was 900 people from the West Bank and Gaza. The poll showed that Al-Quds newspaper is the most trusted and credible paper (43%), followed by Al-Ayyam (7%), Al-Hayat Al-Jadida (6%), and Falasteen and Al-Resala (5% each). As for the most trusted TV channel, Al-Jazeera came first with 47%, followed by PBC (19%), Al-Arabiya (9%) Hamas-affiliated Al-Aqsa (5%), and Al-Manar (3%).

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Al-Quds runs an editorial under the title "Despite the Claimed Freeze, Settlement Expansion Continues" which calls on the international community to find a mechanism to deal with the Israeli government that ensures a full and complete settlement freeze to pave the way for achieving a just and comprehensive peace.

RUBINSTEIN